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Who Is Senator John Kerry? It's Time to Take a Closer Look

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As so often in the past, the Iowa caucuses proved most of the pundits wrong. Kerry's win grants him instant momentum as the race for the Democratic presidential nomination heads for next week's New Hampshire primary. Iowa Democrats gave Kerry an almost stunning margin of victory, granting him 38% of the delegates to the state party's convention. The win reinvigorated Kerry's lackluster campaign and ensures that he will be treated as a front runner headed into next week's primary. It doesn't hurt that New Hampshire borders Massachusetts—Kerry's home and political base.

Most Americans know very little about John Kerry, but that is about to change as media attention will subject the candidate to an entirely new level of scrutiny. Pressure from the media—and pointed attacks by other candidates—will test Kerry's mettle and fortitude.

John Forbes Kerry is a patrician New Englander, and a direct descendent of Puritan John Winthrop and the famous Forbes family—making Kerry one of the "Boston Brahmin" of Massachusetts aristocracy. Richard Kerry, John Kerry's father, was a veteran foreign service officer and diplomat. Kerry was raised as a son of privilege, attending boarding schools in Europe and the United States before attending Yale University.

Kerry's political ambitions emerged early in life, and as a young man he was deeply involved in the political arena. As a teenager, he developed a political infatuation with President John F. Kennedy, and has encouraged comparisons to the last Massachusetts senator to be elected President of the United States. As a boarding school senior, Kerry even dated Janet Auchincloss, the half sister of First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy. At Janet's invitation, Kerry attended events with the Kennedy family, including an opportunity to observe the America's Cup race from the U.S.S. Joseph P. Kennedy with President and Mrs. Kennedy.

Later, Kerry would use the initials "J.F.K." to identify himself—stressing a less-than-subtle commonality with John Fitzgerald Kennedy. He dropped the practice when press attention made the comparison something of an embarrassment.

At Yale, Kerry continued to develop his political instincts and ambition, serving as president of the Yale Political Union. He was also tapped for membership in the "Order of Skull and Bones," a secret society at Yale that has counted several presidents and national leaders among its members—including presidents George Herbert Walker Bush and George W. Bush. A Bush-Kerry race would give the Order of Skull and Bones the ultimate prize—a member as president no matter the outcome. As a final honor, Kerry was chosen to deliver the class oration at graduation. Though Kerry mentioned Vietnam in his address, his position on the war was basically unclear, at least as his politics was concerned. As for his personal decision, Kerry enlisted in the Navy.

As historian Douglas Brinkley points out in *Tour of Duty: John Kerry and the Vietnam War*, “as a child of considerable privilege, he could certainly have gone for the easy out, be it joining the National Guard, getting married, or asking a well-placed family friend to finagle him a draft deferment.” Instead, Kerry went to Vietnam and became a war hero.

In Vietnam, Lt. Kerry served as captain of a “patrol craft fast,” or “PCF.” These fast river crafts were the inland equivalent to the famous “PT.” vessels of World War II—another parallel to the biography of John F. Kennedy. During his time in Vietnam, Kerry would demonstrate genuine heroism and courage under fire, once driving his ship directly into an ambush gunnery. His bravery earned him a Silver Star, a Bronze Star, and three Purple Hearts. In 1969, Kerry reversed the course of his ship under fire and retrieved a wounded sailor from the water, receiving the Bronze Star for his actions, as well as his third Purple Heart. In addition, he earned a ticket home.

This last incident would generate considerable attention for Kerry when the man he retrieved from the river, retired Los Angeles police officer Jim Rassmann, made a surprise appearance at a Des Moines rally just two days before the caucuses.

With his tour in Vietnam behind him, and with the aura of heroism bringing immediate press attention, Kerry catapulted to national prominence when he was called to testify before Congress on the Vietnam War. Kerry had been one of the organizers of “Vietnam Veterans Against the War,” and had established his anti-war credentials. During his testimony, Kerry asked a now famous question that became a rallying cry for many of the war’s opponents: “How do you ask a man to be the last to die for a mistake?”

The depth of Kerry’s political ambition became clear in 1972 when he ran for Congress and lost. Kerry then decided to attend law school, graduating from Boston College’s school of law in 1976. After a short stint as a prosecutor, he was elected lieutenant governor in 1982, running with Governor Michael Dukakis. In 1984, Kerry won his seat in the U.S. Senate, and, as many of his colleagues observed, set his eyes on the White House.

A campaign manifesto is now considered to be a political necessity. John Kerry’s book *A Call to Service: My Vision for a Better America*, sets out his political philosophy and the outlines of a platform for the 2004 race. Kerry downplays his patrician background, but acknowledges that he gained his commitment to public service from his father. After an autobiographical section, the book moves to a series of chapters on various policy issues. Kerry reveals himself to be a fairly typical Democratic senator, comfortably located in the mainstream of the Democratic Party. While his bravery in combat is without question, he has staked out very few political positions that would require courage.

One thing is abundantly clear—Kerry holds an intense dislike for President George W. Bush. Though he uses temperate language throughout the book, he departs from this practice when discussing the President and the Bush administration. In the last days of the Iowa campaign, Kerry increasingly took to vitriolic attacks on the President and his policies.

On matters of economics, education, and the role of government, Kerry’s platform is very similar to the governing philosophy of President Bill Clinton. Kerry wants to repeal at least part of the Bush tax cuts and proposes a host of new federal programs, as well as a dramatic expansion of federal investment in health care.

Kerry stresses his Roman Catholic credentials. “I am a believing and practicing Catholic, married to another believing and practicing Catholic. And being an American Catholic at this particular moment in history has three particular implications for my own point of view as a candidate for the presidency.”

Kerry identified these three implications as rooted in his Catholic faith and experience. “The first commandment means we must believe that there are absolute standards of right and wrong. They may not always be that clear, but they exist, and it is our duty to honor them as best we can.” Kerry’s second and third implications deal with social justice and support for minorities suffering persecution.

It’s Kerry’s first “implication” that is most perplexing. His affirmation of “absolute standards of right and wrong” is at odds with his own governing philosophy and stands on moral issues. Likewise, his claim to be “a believing and practicing Catholic...married to another believing and practicing Catholic,” fails to point out that Kerry has been divorced and

remarried. His second wife, Teresa Heinz Kerry, was the widow of Sen. John Heinz, who was killed in a plane crash in 1991. More significantly, his statement fails to acknowledge that Kerry's position on some crucial social issues is diametrically opposed to that of the Catholic Church.

Kerry has long supported abortion rights and the homosexual agenda. As his campaign manifesto declares, "it's long past the time that we confer full citizenship rights upon gay and lesbian Americans." As Kerry continued, "Some people—including, unfortunately, the president of the United States, argue that recognizing the rights of gays and lesbians in affect confers special privileges on them. That's just another way of saying that the law will be blind to discrimination if it is based on sexual orientation, and that's simply wrong."

Kerry went on to state that no legislation "can make people approve of gays and lesbians if they believe their moral code forbids them to do so, although as a Christian, I believe that this and every other form of discrimination is opposed to the spirit of the Bible." Kerry fails even to acknowledge the clear teachings of the Bible against homosexuality—teachings that comprehensively condemn homosexual behavior in every form.

Kerry also claims to be "equally concerned about a particular threat that we now face to a woman's right to choose." That threat is President George W. Bush. The real danger, Kerry admits, is to the future composition of the Supreme Court. In an address given last year, Kerry stated: "The Republicans want to criminalize the right of women to choose, take us back to the days of back alleys, gag doctors and deny families the right to plan and be aware of their choices—we Democrats want to protect the constitutional right of privacy and make clear that at the center of this struggle is our commitment to have a Supreme Court that will protect the equal rights, the civil rights, and the right to choose in this nation." He opposed the partial birth abortion ban and wants to reauthorize abortions on U.S. military bases.

While the national media will be focusing on political questions about Kerry's personality, stamina, and presidential viability, concerned Christians should focus attention on Kerry's actual governing philosophy and positions on moral issues. It is far too early to know if John Kerry will become the Democratic nominee for 2004. Nevertheless, his positions on abortion and support for the homosexual agenda should be sufficient to preclude John Kerry from a tour of duty in the White House.

